

Business Fire Drills

A step-by-step guide to conduct a business fire drill.

All businesses that serve the public should follow state and local fire codes. Fire codes address many aspects of life safety, including emergency plans, staff training and fire drills. While many businesses are required by the Uniform Fire Code to have an emergency evacuation plan, it would be prudent for all businesses to be prepared in advance of a fire emergency.

1 Practice Prevention



Cleaning and Maintenance

Remove litter, dry grasses and weeds from outside buildings. Dispose of trash properly. Do not overfill dumpsters and garbage bins. Consider placing locks on commercial dumpsters. Ensure flammable materials are stored properly. Offer fire extinguisher training to employees. Limit use of open flames.



Electrical

Train employees not to overload electrical outlets. Unplug small appliances, such as coffee makers, when not in use. Check all power strips to ensure they are not included in a recall. Limit use of extension cords.

2 Develop a Plan



Develop an emergency plan

This plan should include an emergency evacuation procedure, fire drills and the training of employees. Copies of the plan should be available to all personnel. Post the evacuation route in each area of the building. Fire drills *should be practiced at least once each year* unless required more frequently. Fire drills should include the complete evacuation of all buildings. When a fire alarm system is provided, a fire drill can be alarm activated. This familiarizes employees to the sound. Be sure to notify the alarm company and the fire department in advance.



Accountability

Include an assigned meeting place and a system to account for employees and assure complete evacuation. Also, provisions to assist employees, customers or clients who need special help leaving the building. Time the event and invite the fire department to participate.

3 Inform Employees



Know the fire protection features of the building

Familiarize employees with the type of fire protection system in the building. Advise them of the location of pull stations and fire extinguishers and whether the building is protected by fire sprinklers. Demonstrate the fire alarm's sound so employees can respond quickly.



Know the emergency plan and escape route

Every room should have a map posted showing at least two ways out so people can escape, even if one exit is blocked. Employees must know alternate routes of escape, which exit to use and the assigned meeting place outside the building. Time is a critical factor in a fire emergency. It's important to know exactly what to do when the fire alarm sounds. When evacuating, employees should also remember to test doors before opening and crawl low under smoke. Elevators should never be used during a fire.



Act quickly and orderly

Employees need to take each alarm seriously, react immediately and direct clients to the nearest exit in a calm, authoritative voice. An example might be: "We have an alarm in the building, please let me escort you to the nearest exit." Customers are not familiar with your facility and rely on you to show the way.



Prevent Fire Spread

Teach employees to close windows and doors to prevent the spread of fire.

References: "Fire Safety on the Job" 1998, National Fire Protection Association; "Don't Get Alarmed about Fire Safety" by Debbie Feldman, Safeworker, October 1998